

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PANAMA 02948 281737Z

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7543

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AMEMBASSY SEOUL

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE PANAMA 2948

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, PN, KN

SUBJECT: NORTH KOREAN VISIT TO PANAMA

REF: PANAMA 2617

SUMMARY: SECOND VISIT TO PANAMA BY NORTH KOREAN PARTY WITHIN
A MONTH PASSED WITH EVEN LESS NOTICE THAN PREVIOUS ONE REPORTED
REFTEL.

END SUMMARY

1. FOR SECOND TIME WITHIN A MONTH, PARTY OF NORTH KOREANS HAS PAID
A VISIT TO PANAMA. THIS TIME, HEAD OF NORTH KOREAN DELEGATION
WAS KIM YUNG SUN, VICE PRESIDENT OF KOREAN-PANAMANIAN FRIENDSHIP
INSTITUTE OF NORTH KOREA. NAMES OF OTHER VISITORS WERE NOT PUB-
LISHED, BUT ROK EMBASSY HERE ADVISES THAT THEY WERE PARK HAR
JIN, O GI BONG AND KIM DO YUM; WE HAVE NO POSITION TITLES OR
OTHER IDENTIFYING DATA FOR THESE INDIVIDUALS.

2. PRINCIPAL ACTIVITY OF VISIT WAS PRESENTATION BY VISITORS OF
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PAGE 02 PANAMA 02948 281737Z

NORTH KOREAN ORDER OF LABOR AND ORDER OF RED BANNER TO DR.

ROMULO ESCOBAR BETHANCOURT, RECTOR OF UNIVERSITY OF PANAMA AND PRESIDENT OF PANAMANIAN-KORTH KOREAN FRIENDSHIP AND CULTURE INSTITUTE OF PANAMA. GROUP ALSO PRESENTED NORTH KOREAN DECORATIONS TO FOUR OTHER INDIVIDUALS: JOURNALIST MARIO AUGUSTO RODRIGUEZ; EDITOR OF NEWSPAPER "MATUTINO" RAFAEL NUNEZ ZARZAVILLA; NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION MEMBER CARLOS PEREZ HERRERA; AND SALVADOR DE LA IGLESIA. ALL OF THE DECORATED PANAMANIANS ARE OFFICERS OF PANAMANIAN-NORTH KOREAN INSTITUTE, AND SEVERAL HAVE VISITED NORTH KOREA IN RECENT YEARS.

3. ON SEPARATE SUBJECT, KOREAN EMBASSY HERE INFORMS US THAT ROK AMBASSADOR HO EUL WHANG WILL DEPART PANAMA SHORTLY FOR REASSIGNMENT TO TUNIS, AND WILL BE REPLACED HERE BY SUK SHIN CHOI, WHOM ROK EMBASSY ADVISES US RETIRED RECENTLY FROM ARMY WITH RANK OF MAJOR GENERAL.

4. COMMENT: SO FAR AS EMBASSY HAS BEEN ABLE TO LEARN, FIVE PANAMANIANS DECORATED BY THIS GROUP OF VISITORS ARE THE ONLY ONES THAT THE VISITORS SAW. ONLY PRESS COVERAGE WAS CAPTIONED PICTURE OF AWARD OF DECORATIONS IN SOCIETY PAGES OF "ESTRELLA" FOR APRIL 24, AND ANOTHER CAPTIONED PICTURE IN "CRITICA" OF APRIL 26. "MATUTINO", OF WHICH NUNEZ IS EDITOR, HAS NOT YET EVEN PUBLISHED THE PICTURE, NOR HAS MARIO AUGUSTO RODRIGUEZ MENTIONED IT IN HIS COLUMN. WE HAVE NO REASON TO HANGE OPINION REFTEL THAT GOP HAS NO INTENTION OF MAKING A CAUSE CELEBRA OF KOREA ISSUE HERE AT THIS TIME.
END COMMENT.

JORDEN

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